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Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space

by

Jennifer Lynde Barker

Set in a cat-dominated universe, cult film *Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space* (2002) is difficult to pin down: much like cats. Drawing on multiple traditions and conventions from anime, film, philosophy, mythology, fable, art and design, and the genres of noir, space opera sci fi, horror, and westerns, it is a dystopic science fiction film that critiques the status quo and potential future of a capitalist, consumerist world. It does so through the often-lackadaisical actions of a kitten named Tamala, who is resisting her fate as an eternal sacrifice controlled by the cat cult Minerva (otherwise known as the mega-conglomerate Catty & Co.). Does this eclectic mix make it a postmodern masterpiece? Its punk disregard for narrative conventions and coherence juxtaposed with its focus on resisting a fiendish master narrative that has ruled the world for millennia, its seemingly random mix of old and new, high and low, sweet and sour, and childish and profane—not to mention its complex pastiche of cultural referents—suggest yes.

CATTY
diet
petit

The film's convoluted, fragmented storytelling is one of the reasons it has become a cult film, with many confused and unhappy with the film's lack of focus, narrative arc, character development, or satisfactory closure. And while the *cult* in cult film referred originally to a sub-*culture* and departure from mainstream taste and understanding, it has also come to signify over the years a certain fanaticism on the part of fans. Cult films vary in nature and attraction, and *Tamala 2010* falls into the category of intuiting and developing an appreciation for a difficult text—a puzzle, which when unraveled, opens up a new world and rewards the viewer with memorable insights. That *Tamala 2010* focuses its narrative on a cat cult that is engaged in eternal reincarnation and controls every aspect of the landscape and narrative creates a satisfyingly dizzy feeling of mise-en-abyme with form mirroring content.

The plot as such is convoluted, even labyrinthine, when viewed chronologically. But as shorthand, one can say that the film is set primarily in 2010 on Cat Earth (Meguro City, Tokyo) and Planet Q in the Feline Galaxy. It tells the story of Tamala (voiced by Hisayo Mochizuki), a forever-young kitten who has died and been reborn repeatedly since her birth in the constellation of Orion in 1869. She is one of the many pawns of the huge conglomerate Catty & Co., and also its "one true victim." Catty & Co controls 96.725% of the world GDP and is synonymous with the ancient cat cult of Minerva. Within this context, the story focuses in on Tamala's repeated attempts to return to her home planet to see her birth mother (in contrast to her Human Mother who willfully mistreats her). She is unable to, however, because Catty & Co. does not wish her to. There are various characters who help her fulfill or resist her prophesy of eternal victim, including a young cat she befriends on Planet Q, Michelangelo (voiced by Shinji Takeda), a fascist police dog named Kentauros (Roman for centaur) who tortures a little mouse named Penelope, and an older, also seemingly eternal cat named Professor Nominos (voiced by the superb Takeshi Katō), who explains the complex backstory at intervals whilst physically decaying. Notable as well are the ongoing cat vs. dog battles on Planet Q, and the goddess Tatla (wonderfully voiced by Béatrice Dalle), who converses periodically with Tamala via dreams, and who is helping to orchestrate total cat cult domination of the universe.

While Kentarō Nemoto worked on the animation and character design for the film, it was directed, written and produced by anonymous duo K and kuno of t.o.L (trees of Life), who also wrote the music for the soundtrack. The t.o.L duo work in graphic design, illustration and movie and art direction, and one of the few places to find them listed by name is on the soundtrack credits—as Kei Saito and Makiko Kuno. They performed as an indie psychedelia band in the 1990s and their soundtrack for the film is one of its major highlights, with an intriguing range of electronica and one of their older indie songs featured in the end credits. The initial plan for the project was three feature films, but only the first was made. Subsequent short films have been released however, as well as related books and illustrations. *Tamala on Parade* and *Tamala's Wild Party* were released in 2007, with *Wake Up!! Tamala* arriving in 2010.

Various texts and genres are referenced and satirized throughout the film, which begins as many noirs do, with a voiceover narrative slicing through the confusion and darkness while not really providing much guidance. Its style is reminiscent of such sci fi noirs as *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999), *Cowboy Bebop* (1998), and *Dark City* (1998), as well as dystopic films like *The Omega Man* (1971), *Brazil* (1985), *The City of Lost Children* (1995), and Rintaro's cyberpunk anime *Metropolis* (2001). The classic noir voiceover intones a grim tale of incessant rain and waiting for something better to happen while panning through the dark, claustrophobic urban jungle often envisioned in 1990s films. The only spots of light are company logos and names: a capitalist world that has mistaken money for enlightenment. Technology is omnipresent but oppressive and seems capable of sentient rebellion.

The film's genre conventions also specifically pay homage to one of the earliest of these dystopias—*Metropolis* (1927)—with the robot cat character of Tatla, a goddess of destruction and rebirth who haunts the dreams of children with images, working towards fascistic domination, increasingly controlling the "real" world with a virtual one. The gritty cities in these films are places of danger, confusion and weary resignation. Perhaps this fatigue, and the repetition of a dreary world that doesn't seem to make sense even when it is explained at great length, receives an especially cat-like response in the film. Tamala repeatedly falls asleep in

TATL
B.C.3000-B.C.2500

the middle of her adventures and Michelangelo responds to the Professors' complicated explication with sleepy boredom. Such a response seems refreshingly self-protective as it asserts some control for those searching for meaning in a fragmented world that provides no answers even as "fate" meticulously unspools a clearly significant chain of events. Someone knows what is going on, it seems. But when will we? What does it all mean? Time to curl up somewhere warm and take a nap.

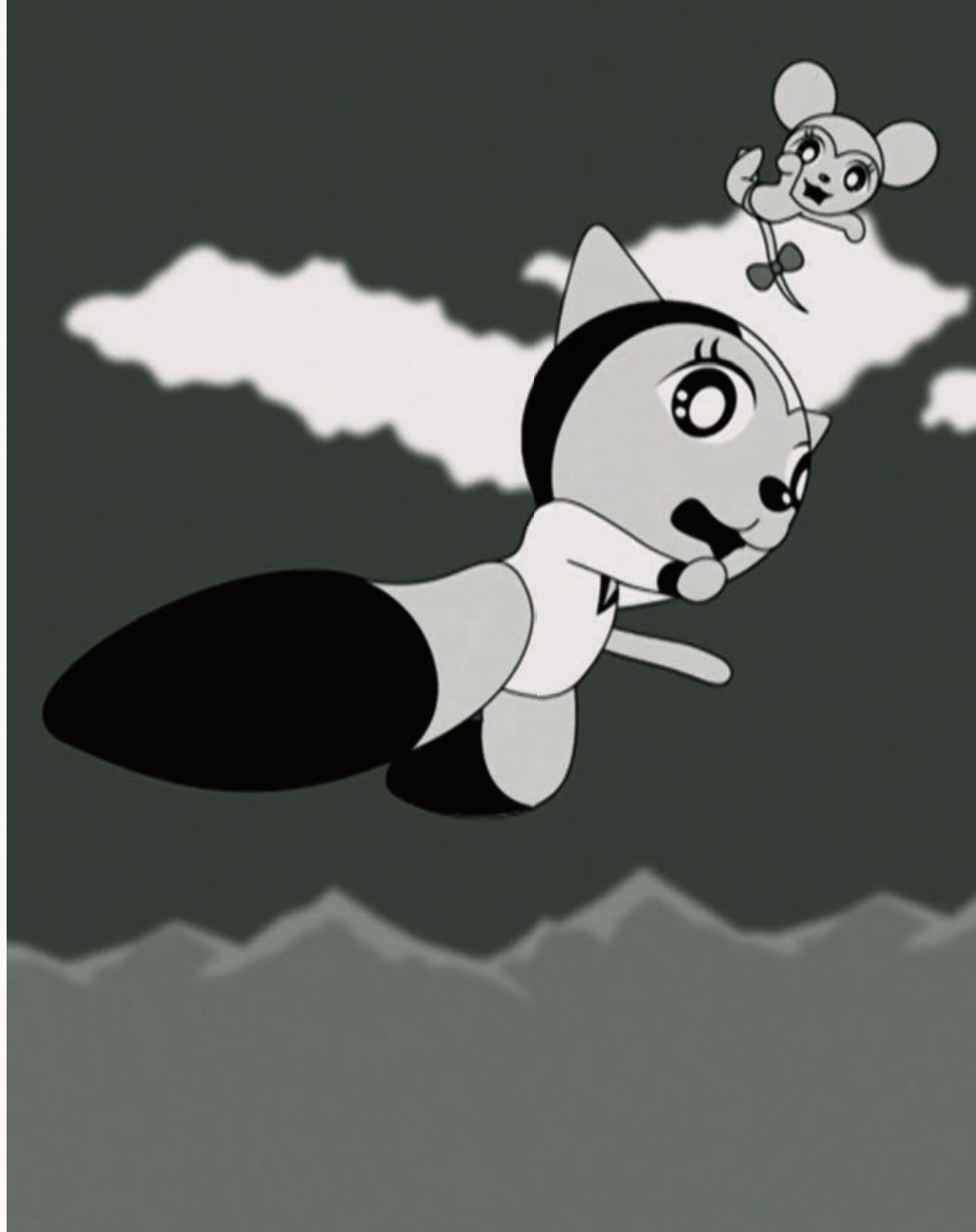
Like any good sci-fi, *Tamala 2010* is layered with both historical and mythological significance. For example, Tamala's birth year of 1869 is also important in Japan as the culmination of the actions of the Meiji Restoration, which resulted in the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, the return of the domains of the Tosa, Hizen, and other daimyōs, the defeat of the Republic of Ezo in the Battle of Hakodate, and the consolidation of power into a centralized government ruled by Emperor Meiji. In the U.S., 1869 is the year the first transcontinental railroad was completed, which conquered distance and paved the wave for global connections, while women received, for the first time in the U.S., the right to vote in the Wyoming Territory, an important step in female emancipation and the kind of independent and irreverent behavior Tamala engages in. Exactly one hundred years later, in 1969, the student protests in Japan signaled a worldwide resistance to centralized power and imperialism (especially in relation to the Vietnam War), alongside protests against the ongoing U.S. occupation (Anpo). The first landing on the moon also took place in 1969, eliminating more distance and creating interstellar connections and communication.

The mythos of the film goes even deeper into the past and involves millennia of plotting for dominance by the Minerva cat cult, dating back to at least 3500 B.C. Part of this is retaliation for persecution, but as Professor Nominos argues, it is also in the nature of the cult to crave war and violence. This covert dominance is increasingly orchestrated by controlling channels of communication and exploiting information: first a postal system (dating from the 15th century in Italy) that expands to include contemporary forms of technological communication, manufacturing, and exchange extending its hold on the social world. Then it encompasses consumer culture: everything that can be devoured or ingested is labeled,

manipulated and sold by Catty & Co. A secret, violent sect becomes a cold, dominating business that rules the world by controlling information. And as with any mythic system, there is a significant and traumatic moment of origin for the hero, in this case Tamala. The Professor identifies the Red Night of Edessa (taking place on Tamala's birthdate—April 29, 1869) as a massacre of 200,000 newborn kittens along the lines of the biblical Massacre of the Innocents, when King Herod ordered male children slaughtered in an attempt to kill the prophesied "King of the Jews." But fate cannot be overwritten and Tamala becomes the chosen one.

As "the one" Tamala is both more powerful than other cats and helpless before her fate: the most important but also the most expendable kitten in the universe. As Nominos argues: "She's the one true victim. She must be saved." However, she does not want to *be* saved; she wants to save herself. Despite being the sucker of fate, she is rebelling both in trying to find her birth mother, and in attempting to escape her role as a sacrifice. She does so with a kind of placid and inattentive insistence and irreverent aplomb. She is not a noble character or devotee of nonviolence. She occasionally beats up kawaii kittens that annoy her and lazily engages in sexual conquests. She is part naïve child and part jaded adult—something that makes her a heroine along the lines of Jane Fonda in *Barbarella* (1968)—even down to her outfit. That Tamala harkens back to this moment in the 1960s in the west is not surprising in terms of Japanese gender politics, but it also underscores that specific moment in the ongoing liberation of women. The movement that gained coherence in 1869 had reached an interesting stage by 1969—with women's sexual liberation often confusing a cool insistence on independence and female pleasure with an exploitative focus on innocent girlishness. This connection is highlighted by showing Tamala's appearance in an American ad for prescription drugs from 1969, in which she appears both childish and erotic, as well as a later J-pop performance she gives to the raving masses.

Tamala is sacrificed and reborn over and over again, forever remaining a kitten but somehow retaining the karmic weight of her age—she is equal parts naïve and saucy, old and young. And yet listing such dichotomies does not truly convey the nature of her character, as they exist simultaneously and not side-by-side. Just as they do with Barbarella, or, in



Catty's
Safety Matches
Made
in
Meguro
Containing Over 100 Sticks

the world of animation, a character like Betty Boop or Astro Boy. Tamala references these two in her visual design: the big eyes and eyelashes and head, the feet that seem to end in missiles or rockets, the streamlined body, the kankles. But she, like them, also occupies the cusp between child and adult. Astro Boy is an eternal child because of his robot design, and his personality often reflects this, but he's an adult in other ways (and the series sometimes plays with the idea of sexuality). Betty Boop also has a girlish voice and demeanor yet looks and acts like a woman. This dichotomy of youth and age, knowing innocence and artless sexuality, reinforces the timeless quality of her character. Tamala's continual re-births mean she never has to accept the consequences of her actions; there is no reason for her to learn to behave responsibly. This, in turn, gives her a fresh perspective and counterpoint to the desperate, cynical, even depraved creatures around her. For her hope springs eternal in seeking her dreams.

Besides being a contradictory character, Tamala is a complex kitty. She might be sleepy, have the zoomies and seek attention, like all kittens, but she also undermines the image of the cheerful kitten and widely riffs on other kitty characters, most notably Hello Kitty. Like Tamala, Sanrio's globally famous character was not "born" in Japan, but London. Unlike Tamala, she has no mouth, and therefore cannot sass; rather, she has a positive and relatively pure outlook on life. Hello Kitty was a character who dominated the 1980s and 1990s, and Tamala's punk attitude certainly mirrors the attitude of many Gen X teenagers who basically despised mainstream marketing. When Tamala attacks a cute little happy kitten, there is a satisfying sense of putting that famous kitty in its place. A lesser-known character type by San-X, Nyan Nyan Nyanko debuted in 2000 and featured small white kittens who transformed into various things, perhaps most bizarrely as burgers, fries, and drinks in a series of "happy meal" animated shorts. Unperturbed by their immanent brutal demise, they squeaked happily. This aligns well with the oft-asserted theme of consumption in the film. Tamala's remark "I'm delicious…" and the film's motto "see me, hear me, eat me" also highlight the pleasure of being devoured—something akin to confirming one's desirability and the dissolution of self that being eaten implies (both actually and sexually).

Tamala's significance may even reference the traditional maneki-neko "good luck" cat often displayed in the windows of shops to beckon in customers. After Tamala's death, Michelangelo sees a mechanical paw flop down and claw—or beckon—under the bench he is sitting on. Named after the artist who famously painted the moment of God's creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo Nominos may or may not be the very same Professor Nominos, an idea suggested by the Professor himself. Indeed, the name Nominos likely references the Latin verb *nomino*—to name or make famous—something both characters do. The Professor says at one point while laughing, "I know all, see all, hear all"—a reversal of the traditional Japanese three wise monkeys (no seeing, no hearing, no speaking), as Nominos sees what is hidden and speaks about it as well. This character doubling applies also to Tamala and Michelangelo: she calls him Moimoi, which may be baby language for "meow," but also translates as "me me." While these connections are intriguing, they don't seem to run very deep. Michelangelo finds the Professor bizarre and runs when Tamala is in danger, and Tamala kicks off the Professor's head altogether. It seems rather that "Cats live in loneliness. Then die like falling rain"—an idea repeated in the film.

Much of the film design is meant to be a mixture of the derivative and unique. As a critique of consumer culture and the excesses of capitalism, it necessarily must reproduce that excess. This is clear in its intertextual references as well as mise-en-scène. The film at times recalls *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Akira* (1988), for example, as precursors to its world. With its clipper spaceship and philosophical focus it evokes Leiji Matsumoto space operas *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (1977-79) and *Galaxy Express 999* (1977-1981). With its focus on cat characters, death and rebirth, and philosophical questions it also conjures the classic *Night on the Galactic Railroad* (1985). It even harkens back to 1930s American animation. The cuteness of the characters was a typical design for the 1930s and even the skeleton Dark God of Death is kawaii in the film. In addition to Betty Boop's design, the Fleischer Brothers' short film *Bimbo's Initiation* (1931) bears some relevant similarities. A surreal horror comedy about identity and conformity, it features the dog Bimbo as a reluctant wanna-be member of a cult. Its big reveal is that under the masks we don to fit in with others, we are exactly the same. It also uses the

elusive, omnipresent Betty Boop as the sexy secret weapon that will lead others into domination by the cult, just as Tamala does.

Tamala 2010 references horror films as well, most notably Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), with visions of twin girls and a hatchet imbedded in various things. The Professor might be a living dead figure from any number of horror films as he talks while maggots fall from him and his face deteriorates. While it may not be a specific quotation, the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) occupies a similar space, aesthetic, and wit: the updated version of Barbarella's innocent, pretty, yet kick-ass heroine dies and is reborn again as an increasingly world-weary savior and sacrifice who is bound to her fate. The repetitive and cheery exterior of Catty & Co. advertising is also undercut by horror. Easy answers are plastered everywhere: "Let's! Catty diet!" and "Safe and Healthy… The ultimate meat… for a great you!" Yet the latter is heard being voiced by the beloved-in-Japan KFC icon The Colonel, who is wandering around as a Godzilla-like kaiju through the streets with a plate of fried chicken and a hatchet in his head. Westerns also feature heavily in the film with overarching tropes and characters, and even a particular fascination with Clint Eastwood, seen in posters and mentioned by Michelangelo, who is an avid member of the "Clint Eastwood club."

The visual design of the film is equally complicated, diverse, and crammed full of stuff: a futuristic yet familiar landscape with nods to contemporary human Earth, including a "toL Designing" sign, Love Hotel, fast food signs, video games, movie posters and more. The 2D grey contemporary world contrasts with a sepia past and Tatla's invasive 3D dream world is primarily a dark industrial landscape (only Tamala's regeneration room is in psychedelic colors). Even video and 16mm images are cited. Art and graphic design of all kinds are featured, especially during the Professor's lecture, with its fascinating array of ads, coins, masks, stamps, manuscripts and photographic evidence. The Extinct Animal Museum offers visual styles ranging from conceptual art to ancient frescos, which contain sadistic and brutal imagery. This is mirrored in the photographs that police dog Kentauros takes of his captive mouse, who is poetically revenged when Kentauros is killed by children: "Every dog does have his day," as one character quips. This is the underbelly of the rounded and cute animated

style that is the film's primary aesthetic. Everything has its dark side: the kawaii world that should be kind is run through with the darker strains of hate and hostility and often this dichotomy is depicted simultaneously—with the cute little cult kittens wearing hoods reminiscent of the KKK.

This can be seen in one of the primary literary allusions as well. Our first introduction to Planet Q is a swallow trying to peck out the eyes of a statue: the "Fuckin' Prince," situated at the center of a run-down neighborhood. This reference to Oscar Wilde's story "The Happy Prince" (1888) is a cynical take on what is already a cynical tale about humanity. Wilde tells the story of a statue of a prince, sheltered from sadness and poverty while alive, who finally lives for others when he becomes a statue. He develops a close relationship with a bird who helps him transform the poverty around them with their love and the statue's ornaments. But the town government sees only how shabby the statue has become and both are destroyed. God rewards them in the tale, but in the film this is not an option; neither does love transform them. They remain antagonistic and isolated, and when the Prince is hauled away at the end the swallow merely watches with angry eyes. There is no redemption in this land—no spark of compassion in its inhabitants.

The tone and scope of Tamala 2010 is continued in *Tamala on Parade.* Tamala's karmic cycle of destruction and rebirth makes time cyclical rather than linear, and this can be seen especially well in this colorful film. In it, she enters the virtual 3D world in a kind of video game mode where she walks continuously with her weapons, encountering a pastiche of ads, Tatla as the Statue of Liberty, and the Galaxy Express, before enacting Edgar Allen Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," by getting tricked by Death and losing her head just like Poe's protagonist Toby Dammit. *Tamala's Wild Party* also returns to the same characters and spaces, with the Fuckin' Prince and sparrow still on the square, Michelangelo waiting on Tamala's whims, and images from the feature film permeating throughout. Yet some things are different, suggesting an alternate timeline: we see Tamala, shedding her cat outfit, silhouetted as a human woman in a shower, and at an occult gathering she and others tangle with ghosts—a wild party indeed.

ARET CATTY
RIPTEASE
may 3
1920
CATTY
LIGHTS
即効
1958
CATTY&Co.

Wake Up!! Tamala is the most didactic of the films: set in rainy Meguro City in 2050, Tamala befriends a small bee who becomes her guide to the environmental crisis and cycle of life. The two move back in time to pre-history, with Tamala walking through an evolutionary process to understand the present-day climate disaster. The film ends with the proclamation "Wake up or Die," with live footage of endangered animals underscoring the urgency of the issue. In fact, the urgency of consumerist capitalist crisis is also threaded through *Tamala 2010*, but with more finesse. It can be seen with the focus on time: multiple close-ups of an almost skeleton-shaped clock (sometimes with the hands moving backwards) that recall Wong Kar-wai's practice of foregrounding clocks, as *In the Mood for Love* (2000). These images conceptually put time in center stage: time is running out. Yet the film also, more pessimistically, considers time irrelevant. There is never really any progress or release from the Buddhist cycle of suffering, especially for Tamala who is acutely aware of the process. Or is there? This mixture of hope and despair is one of the things that makes the film so compelling.

One wonders if *Tamala 2010* influenced the hyper-capitalist-landscape and mixture of cuteness and smut in the animated short *Logorama* (2009), made by another collective graphic design and animation studio: H5. French team François Alaux, Hervé de Crécy and Ludovic Houplain's logo-ridden universe gloriously flaunts copyright law along with the idea of corporate ownership of the world. Regardless of their knowledge of Tamala, the film exists in the same sub-genre of zany perverse animated sci-fi apocalyptic dystopias and would make a fine double feature. The cynical yet nostalgic ethos of late capitalism makes a pitch-perfect conclusion in the film as Tamala intones "Another fucking day has begun," lighting a cigarette and riding off into the sunset, so to speak, a punk cowgirl heading in her spaceship for Orion, planet of her birth: the weary hero continues, joylessly, in pursuit of an impossible dream—the only sign of integrity in a rotting world. Yet there is still hope of a kind on the horizon. Currently in the works is *Tamala 2030*, with clips intermittently released on the Tamala twitter account. While it is not entirely possible to determine what new adventures are in store for Tamala, no doubt they will be splendid.

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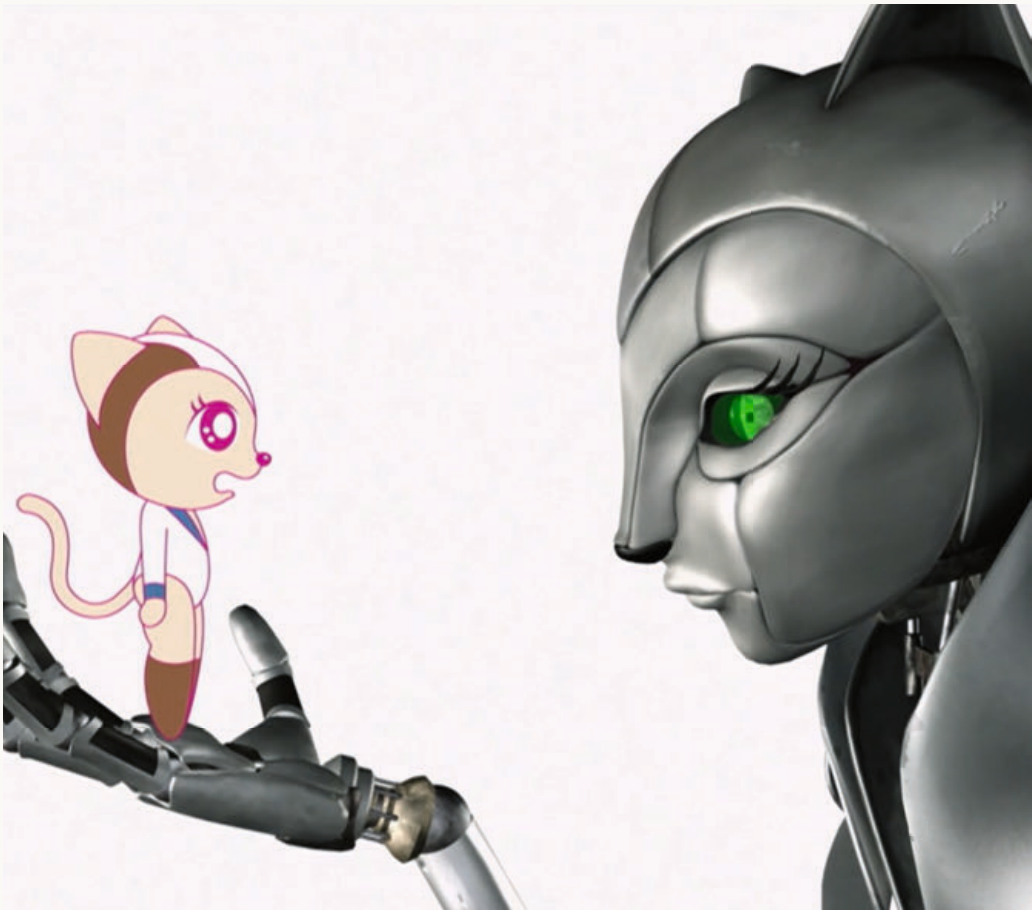

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Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space

by

Walter Chaw

I have sought for years to worry the intoxicating tangle of Japanese popular culture that seems to exist as a tension between the polarities of extreme nihilism such as in their horror cinema, and extreme cuteness as evidenced in certain broad tendencies in anime and consumer culture. Does the softness of the one salve the abrasive existential emptiness of the other? How about the works of Hayao Miyazaki which marries the adorable with the abominable in startling combinations - or Satoshi Kon whose astonishing "Paranoia Agent" series centers around a shy graphic artist, the creator of a pink dog mascot adjacent to Sanrio's "Hello Kitty" who, one night, is beaten viciously by a young boy on rollerblades a terrified populace comes to call "Lil Slugger." Her attacker is a manifestation of the innocent, you see, the insipid functioning as the avenging avatar of a country balanced between traumatic contradictions. Most of us in the United States were introduced to Japanese animation through classic series like "Speed Racer" and "Astro Boy" - line drawings and designs centered around the "big eyes, small mouth" template. Many of us were introduced to Japanese horror films as a kind of contraband, in brown-paper wrapped VHS bootlegs ordered from catalogs until

9/11 made the darkest of Japanese horrors fodder for remakes and teen bestsellers. An attack by a WMD on sovereign ground, targeting civilian targets, deadened a part of us and drew us closer philosophically to our WWII antagonists. As a kid, I was obsessed with "Voltron," my gateway drug into *Akira* when I was fifteen which rewired my mind with its "cute" characters transplanted into a cyberpunk setting playing out a story about genetic mutations and the tyranny of corporate city-states. There is something particularly effective about using relics from childhood - or children themselves - as objects of social satire and resistance. It's like pointing to parts on a darling, dew-eyed teddy bear to show where on your own body you've been damaged.

Sometime in 1998, K. and kuno, two artists known collectively as t.o.L ("trees of life"), approached animator/multi-media artist Kentarō Konpon to collaborate on a feature project inspired by parts of Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49. I would offer that it's at least as inspired by John Carpenter's *They Live* and Matthew Barney's five-film Cremaster Cycle, too, the last of which released in the same year, 2002, as the film that resulted from t.o.L's and Konpon's partnership, *Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space*. A contemporary review of Pynchon's novel called is a "a metaphysical thriller in the form of a pornographic comic strip." Closer to the point, I think the book - and all of Pynchon's best work - is engaged in identifying the sources of disassociation in modern culture: why has human communication become gibberish and how did we allow human imagination to become commodified and imprisoned by the very mechanisms it invented. At some point, all of our interactions with the world are reduced to tasks unrelated to essential human impulses like friendship, for instance, and love - our lives reduced to finding plots and dark purposes in unrelated, random complications. We are haunted by our desire to find meaning: to be a part of either a grand plan or the resistance to it. The irony for Pynchon, of course, is how as soon as we imagine a side, we become a dehumanized function of it. The moment of radicalization in Carpenter's *They Live* comes when our hero, freighted with the Pynchonian name "John Nada" (a "nothing" suggesting Kafka's

"K" as both cipher and everyman - and remember "K" is the symbol taken by one half of t.o.L.), discovers a pair of glasses that allows him to see the Plan of a pervasive and insidious capitalist takeover. It is Neo's red pill from *The Matrix*. It pulls the curtain back on our role as a cog in an inhuman machine. In The Crying of Lot 49, the hero, unhappy housewife Oedipa Mass, through her growing unease over the inhumanity of mankind to one another, uncovers what she believes is a "revelation in progress all around her" in which every inanimate object points to a conspiracy involving hiding, and revealing, the existence of a secret postal service called Tristero that runs the world.

Tamala 2010 exists in a similar, post-modern civilization overrun by corporations where everything is reduced to trademarks, industrial logos and saleable goods on the one side -- consumers impelled by an inanimate, subliminal "revelation all around" us on the other. The Japanese psyche in modernity is shaped largely by the twin traumas of WWII and the American occupation during the country's reconstruction. Its sense of self is split between pride in its Bushido culture, shame at its actions during war (or the losing of it), and confused identification with its conquerors who suffused the island nation with mass-produced American artifacts and extruded entertainments. In the same way, Pynchon's books about America hinge on what seems to be his essential faith in the ideals of the United States at odds with all evidence that America is a republic built with a death wish, actively engaged in the manufacture of a system that will inevitably destroy it. When people say that Capitalism is broken because of the wealth gap and the systemization of real human suffering, I always respond that Capitalism is doing exactly what it's designed to do. Capitalism is thriving. Pynchon's Tristero then, in Oedipa's reasoning, is either a tantalizing puzzle for her to understand the nihilistic tension in America's culture of acquisition; a hoax designed by an even greater, and invisible, corporate monolith desperate to distract from the discovery of its controls of all forms of human mass communication (Pynchon calls this corporation Inverarity); or it might at the end just be a fantasy fabricated by Oedipa in order to explain the disassociation of her friends and loved

ones. We experienced something like this once when the Vietnam War was televised, a mass disconnection between people affected existentially by those images and those hardened into denial and equivocation. We're experiencing it again with the live-streaming of the razing of Gaza. There can't be this much acceptance of inhumanity among people we thought we knew, can there? It must be Tristero.

The "Tristero" of *Tamala 2010* is the existence of an ancient, persistent cult worshiping the goddess Minerva. The virgin goddess of, among other things, commerce in Roman mythology, "Cat Earth's" Minerva is a dark mistress demanding "human" (read: "cat") sacrifice and functioning essentially as the artificial intelligence Hel from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* - the reason at its root for the Metropolis' creation of a cruel, world-devouring but profit-making machination Lang equates with the Temple of Moloch and its own sacrificial, cannibalistic rites. We see hieroglyphic, Bosch-like representations of the atrocities of the Minerva Cult (much like Moloch's in *Metropolis*) in a secret exhibit in the basement of a museum in *Tamala 2010*, discovered when an adorable, pop-eyed anime cat stumbles upon it after nearly pissing herself in search of a toilet. The emblem of the Minerva cult (like the emblem of the muted horn in The Crying of Lot 49) appears throughout *Tamala 2010*, as the corporate logo of monolithic Catty & CO that controls Hate City on Planet Q where Tamala, *Tamala 2010*'s hero, a cat drawn in the Hello Kitty tradition (and Betty Boop, it bears mentioning), crashes her spaceship while on her way back to her birthplace in the constellation Orion. In this construction, Tamala is Oedipa of The Crying of Lot 49 as self-deluded and paranoid - not the discoverer of a grand design, but a literal alien trying to make sense of an America that isn't hiding its darkness, but a product of it. America *is* Tristero. Hate City *is* the Minerva Cult. The logo for the Minerva cult in *Tamala 2010* is a pair of giant cat's eyes, one blank and one filled and very much like the painted pair of giant eyeglasses on a billboard advertising long-dead optometrist Dr. Eckleburg overlooking the Valley of Ashes, evidence of Man's growing inhumanity, in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. The character "Owl Eyes" in that same book, related to this billboard

through his position as observer, is the only attendant at Gatsby's death - his name refers to the goddess Minerva's animal familiar and her relationship to concepts of wisdom and planning. *Tamala 2010* is the peak of post-modernism in the sense that it holds no meaning without the things that came before it, and grows in resonance the more lines you can draw from it to artifacts in our shared cultures. It is the beneficiary of your unpacking of its "revelation in progress." It is alive with signs and signifiers. It's alive. And the message it has for us is the evidence we unearth from the things around us are not clues to a nefarious plot, but a blueprint our countries have followed from America's inception and colonial conquests and interventions.

The residents of Hate City have nothing good to say and no good deeds to do. Their kindness towards one another has curdled in their breast. They greet each other in filthy bars with cruel gossip and when they part, they level mean invectives at one another: "Later, you anaconda bitch," and "shut up, you queeny twink." A loudspeaker warns Hate City is about to enter into a state of martial law and forced segregation between dogs and cats. The Metropolis/Tristero/The Valley of Ashes/Hate City has almost completed the perversion of its citizens into pistons in a insatiable, insensible engine. Even simple, boggle-eyed cat Michelangelo who drives a cow hide-patterned Porsche and who becomes, through accident and circumstance, Tamala's boyfriend on Planet Q, is introduced in a library checking out a book on knives. He would do violence if he weren't a coward, this simpering toad. Tamala speaks in a piping, pursed-lip burble: simpering, ingratiating, affecting extreme childishness in the Marilyn Monroe style while asking rude questions about what Michelangelo is planning for mating season. She says "I'm very tasty. Wanna eat me?" She is a Mae West vulgarian - a porn star asked to play the naif. But she's as hollow and pretty as a seashell - an empty husk where something used to live. If you think of her as Mickey Mouse, a corporate emblem recognized as a symbol for commerce (and avarice and litigiousness as a consequence of that filthy lucre), the crudeness her appearance becomes a pointed, even hostile commentary. Disney's most treasured icon cast as an old,

vicious whore that sells itself in the memory of a child's dearest friend. "My looks are all me's got," Tamala tells Michelangelo after spinning a tale of being turned out by her mother in order to secure her own sweets. There's a cop character, too, Kentaurus who keeps a sex slave in a cage in his apartment and lusts after Tamala: a leather daddy decorating his walls with illicit polaroids of his victims in bondage as t.o.L cuts between it and a psychedelic guitar band that falls in thrall to Tamala's sexualized gyrations. A crowd becomes a mob. Tamala lights a torch and the screen goes red with fire. In less than a day on Planet Q, the first billboard goes up advertising designer jeans by Catty & CO and an arena full of Hate City's youth find a leader for their cult of personality. It happens just that fast.

Tamala 2010 identifies itself as the tale of "a punk cat" because at its heart its ethos is punk rock. It's decidedly low-fi in style, disorganized according to accepted standards of storytelling, and angry about the disingenuous and the artificial. Radio reports mass casualty events at protests, car accidents claiming countless innocents, despair and social collapse all normalized to such an extent that there's no will left to fight except amongst the most powerless. Sequences of the film are computer-animated, suggesting just by that choice the further dehumanization of our arts, predicting the incoming A.I. revolution that will fail and fail until it finally succeeds because there has been too much money invested by the people who run the world for it to fail for good. The soulless peddling for the soulless. I know the filmmakers had hoped a merchandise line would spring from their film - and that their film would be a trilogy. I don't know if they meant it or if they're just taking a shot at artists who are either driven by, or immediately seduced by, Moloch at the moment of their greatest success. *Tamala 2010* is engorged with rage, with indignation that we would allow ourselves to become so desensitized to suffering that we cheer it for others while ignoring our own. Remember the versions of ourselves that used to be bothered by violence? What killed it? Why did you let it happen? Midway, Tamala and Michelangelo wander through Hate City as little children start drawing the Catty & CO logo on the sidewalks and Tamala pushes a random kid to the ground. Throughout,

2006-2007

The Battle

A Purple Cat

AtoZ

Persian

RUSSIAN ART

2004-2005

The Secret TATLA

The Lyrics of Cat Stevens

Dogs are People Too

夢十夜

РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ

Песня и Смерть

Abyssinians

Глава любовь

Cats & Dogs

Report2010

Don't Kill Him

Les Memoirs

Birds

Etiquette

TO TELL THE TRUTH

Kitty Carlisle

フォークルスタイル編

The Histry

KINETIQUE COLLECTION

A Young Kittens guide AtoZ

ネモ君事件簿

English QJapanese Dictionary

FUTURE 3000

悪霊

FUTURISMO

TATLA THE BEAUTY

Other Report2010

pay attention to all these pervasive images from Kubrick films like the light tunnel from the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the Grady twins (and journey through the forested mountains) from *The Shining*, the fetishized misanthropy of *A Clockwork Orange* - Kubrick who is a certain embodiment of chilliness, of the anti-human or the post-human future, for the dry commercialization of sex. Through it all, too, references to Andy Warhol's Pop Art that of all the things it did, also identified how art slides into a self-negating consumerism; and finally to Matthew Barney's Cremaster Series that found in all of man's achievements (serial murder, automobiles, architecture, amputations, tradition) the hand of the secret order of Masons providing a grand design to the American atrocity exhibition.

Of all its sources, the nods to Pynchon and Fitzgerald, to Kubrick and Warhol, to Japanese traditions of children's anime and Sanrio's dominance of a specific kind of cute, to Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* and Alex Proyas' *Dark City* - ultimately what *Tamala 2010* most recalls is Philip K. Dick's work in general, his late novel Ubik in particular. Ubik follows a technician named Joe Chip who works for an organization employing people with the power to dampen "precogs" who are hired mainly to engage in corporate espionage. The book's future has partially-conquered death, allowing the deceased a kind of half-life through which they can communicate occasionally with the living. It's partially conquered time travel as well, resulting in shifts in reality as the past is meddled with constantly by profit-seekers looking to take advantage of a four-dimensional marketplace. Reality is malleable, lives are bought and sold, and each chapter is introduced by scripts for old-fashioned commercials for a product called "Ubik," which is every product, essentially, and by the end reveals itself to be the creator of the entire universe and its prime driver, too. There is a scene in *They Live* where Nada's glasses reveal that all of his cash is printed with the phrase "THIS IS YOUR GOD." I think that's what Dick is trying to say about not how our morality has decayed, but rather how our morality has only ever been a lie meant to rationalize, even valorize, what we can accumulate, how, and how

much. The end of *Tamala 2010* jumps into the future as an aged, rapidly-decomposing scholar delivers a lecture on his lost Tamala (she's been raped and devoured by the bad cop) in the now-distant past. He says "She never dies, she's one-year-old forever. She's the one true victim. She must be saved." Look at the way western culture's diffusion into Japan is discussed through the cowboy gear (and the atrocity of Manifest Destiny it represents) her image is used to peddle - how the same basic images are used over and over again and how the Tamala character's immortality becomes a metaphor for it: "repeated destruction and rebirth, the progress of an undying world." Tamala the endless, just the latest in a long line of brilliant sociological meditations on the monstrousness of our creation, this rough beast Capitalism voracious, its ravenousness never slated and your lives and desires insignificant before its hunger. Tamala is resurrected at the end, struts through a slum, bums a cigarette, blows out slow and pipes in her sexy-baby doll squeak "another fucking day." *Tamala 2010* is a masterpiece of pop disaffection and post-modern smarts. It's a textbook and a manifesto designed for nailing on the pine doors of our financial and cultural institutions. It's punk rock, hear her roar.

Walter Chaw is Senior Film Critic for FilmFreakCentral.net. He has bylines in the *NY Times, Washington Post, Criterion, The LA Weekly, NY Post's Decider, NY Magazine's Vulture*, and is an occasional guest on NPR's "Pop Culture Happy Hour." He has written a monograph on *Miracle Mile* and a critical study of the career of Walter Hill called "A WALTER HILL FILM."

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